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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KHIV](#) [SOCI](#) [TBIO](#) [CH](#)
SUBJECT: HIV/AIDS IN SHANGHAI'S GAY COMMUNITY

REF: SH 318

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¶1. (U) Summary: While most members of the Shanghai gay community believed that they were not at great risk for becoming infected with HIV/AIDS, researchers and health specialists said HIV/AIDS was spreading faster in Eastern cities such as Shanghai than through drug usage. According to health workers and researchers, NGOs were having difficulties in Eastern China reaching high-risk members of the gay community due to the precarious nature of NGOs in China and the illegal status of sex workers. Many complained that the Shanghai Center for Disease Control (CDC) registry of HIV/AIDS patients infringed on patients' privacy, had a "scolding" attitude towards patients and was reluctant to share statistics on HIV/AIDS for fear of "alarming" people. This is the second of four cables updating the social, legal, medical and media issues of the gay community in Shanghai. End Summary.

RISKY BEHAVIOR

¶2. (SBU) During the month of April, Poloff met with members of Shanghai's gay community, healthcare specialists and academics to discuss medical issues in the gay community. According to Shanghai CDC HIV/AIDS Deputy Director Pan Qiqiao, in 2006 there were 718 new HIV/AIDS patients reported in Shanghai, which was 50 percent higher than the number reported for 2005. Around 500-600 of the new HIV/AIDS patients did not have a Shanghai residency permit, and the gay community comprised only a small percentage of the 718 cases.

¶3. (SBU) Members of the gay community were aware of HIV/AIDS but were not concerned about the disease. Two young gay men living in Shanghai said HIV/AIDS was something they had known about since they were very young and first heard about it on TV. They believed, however, that in China it was mainly a disease of "drug users and not spread among people having sex." None of

them knew anyone who had contracted the disease. A lesbian said that the gay community in Shanghai was not concerned enough about AIDS or the need to protect themselves. She did not know anyone with AIDS and said "the concept of contracting it was not a reality to most gay Shanghainese."

¶4. (SBU) Researchers and healthcare specialists held a different view and were concerned about risky behavior among the gay and lesbian communities. Deputy Director Pan Qiqiao said although HIV/AIDS was spreading fastest in China through drug use, in Shanghai and other large eastern cities HIV/AIDS was spreading most rapidly through sexual intercourse. He noted that from an infectious disease perspective, although the percentage of HIV/AIDS patients in Shanghai was quite low, there was a great deal of potential risk, so the best approach was to change people's lifestyles.

¶5. (SBU) Researchers have also noticed the increased rates of HIV/AIDS transmission among Shanghai's homosexual community. Director of the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences (SASS) Research Center for HIV/AIDS Public Policy Professor Xia Guomei said, "I don't know the exact rate, but we've discovered that those who tested positive are mainly from the gay community." Fudan University School of Public Health Associate Professor Gao Yanning said the local challenges of countering HIV/AIDS were more difficult than in the West because many men did not fully identify as being gay. He has tried to educate men about using a condom not only with their male partners but also with their female partners. A senior doctor at the International Peace Maternity and Child Health Hospital engaged in HIV/AIDS prevention was also concerned about risk behavior that he saw in the gay community. According to a survey he conducted of 200 people in gay venues, only 20 percent of gay men said they used condoms. He believed that many in the gay community viewed HIV/AIDS as "trying their luck." Much like smokers and lung

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cancer, "people knew there was a risk but kept smoking."

¶6. (U) Male sex workers emerged as prime candidates for HIV/AIDS transmission because they service both male and female clients. Last year, Professor Xia conducted a study on female prostitutes in Shanghai. While conducting research, she was shocked to discover that the buildings known to house prostitutes contained more male sex workers than female. Male sex workers sleep with both genders, some even maintaining a girlfriend or wife. Fees ranged from 50-700 RMB, on average around 375 RMB, and female customers were charged much higher rates than male customers. Some sex workers accepted even more money to not use a condom. Le Yi Foundation, a NGO helping male sex workers, has had three sex workers who tested positive for HIV/AIDS, and all have fled Shanghai. Le Yi Program Officer Tony Zheng said that the majority of the sex workers have not been tested which is alarming considering the high-level of customer turn-over. According to Mr. Zheng, "a client will be met maybe one or two times but after that there usually won't be a third time," since clients preferred a new sex worker.

5-Year Plan to Counter HIV/AIDS

¶7. (U) On April 9, the National CDC in Beijing posted a draft of "China's Five-Year Strategy for AIDS Prevention Amongst MSM (men-who-have-sex-with-men) Population" on its public website with a deadline of April 30 for any critiques. According to the draft, it was estimated that 47,000 of among 650,000 people infected with HIV/AIDS in China, were MSM, or 7.3 percent. It said that China had monitored the MSM population for HIV/AIDS since 2004. Shanghai CDC HIV/AIDS Deputy Director Pan added that, "in the past two years, the Shanghai CDC has done biological monitoring of sexually transmitted diseases (STD) and HIV/AIDS rates through NGOs like Le Yi."

¶8. (U) The report's data indicated that the national percentage of HIV/AIDS infections had increased from 1-3 percent in 2004 to 2.5-6.5 percent in recent years. The report's three main

suggestions to counter HIV/AIDS in the gay male population were to encourage governmental cooperation with all related groups (social groups, NGOs and MSM groups); to fully encourage the MSM group to participate in AIDS prevention; and to give priority to prevention education combined with treatment plans.

Obstacles to Reaching the Gay Community

¶9. (SBU) Professor Xia considered NGOs and people within the MSM community to have done the best work in educating the community about protection from sexually transmitted diseases. She said that "only gay volunteers could spot gay Chinese and truly be concerned for their rights." However, she pointed out that in China, NGOs and volunteers operated in an unstable environment.

¶10. (SBU) For example, the Le Yi Foundation was not registered as a government-owned non-governmental organization (GONGO), although the Shanghai government was aware of its work with male sex workers. Instead, Le Yi was registered as a private company which made it ineligible for government funding. Le Yi received support from Oxfam in Hong Kong, but since it was a private company, the money was subject to an 11 percent income tax. Professor Xia said funding from foreign sources, even well-known groups like the Ford Foundation and Oxfam, put Chinese NGOs in "a sensitive existence" with the government.

¶11. (SBU) Professor Xia also complained that the most effective types of outreach and advertising campaigns to target the gay community were not permitted by the government. She believed Shanghai needed more direct advertisements, or social marketing, to the gay community. Xia added that people knew the risks of not using condoms but pointed to the example of a PhD student who contracted HIV/AIDS through intercourse. "If even a PhD

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student will have high-risk behavior, what about everyone else?" she asked.

¶12. (SBU) A senior doctor who worked with the gay community also thought that social marketing directed at the gay community would be effective. He said, however, that it would be impossible to have social marketing directed at the gay community in China because of the government's unclear policy towards the gay community. "They have no regulations towards the group, the only thing illegal is public sex." Due to the government's silence towards the gay community, and since it is not a protected class or minority, he could only use posters advertising condoms rather than tailored ads featuring two men.

¶13. (SBU) Mr. Zheng noted that it was very difficult to reach some members of the community, especially male sex workers. He said that male sex workers tended to be very resistant to outside assistance because their line of work was illegal. They constantly lived in fear of the police who target sex workers if they receive a tip or complaint about solicitation. Police raids resulted in a 5000 RMB fine and 15 days of detention. Mr. Zheng pointed out that ironically a sex worker who was arrested for prostitution needed to service even more customers in order to pay the fine. The majority of sex workers suspected that Mr. Zheng was linked to the police. This attitude impacted the number of men Mr. Zheng was able to convince to be tested for HIV/AIDS and other diseases. He was also unable to advertise Le Yi's services because of China's strict regulations regarding NGOs and GONGOS, and because the male sex worker population did not want to be exposed.

TESTING: PRIVACY A CONCERN

¶14. (SBU) According to Shanghai CDC HIV/AIDS Deputy Director Pan, HIV/AIDS testing was available at every district's CDC office in Shanghai. The first time someone took an HIV/AIDS test at a testing center, the patient was not required to use his or her real name. If the result was negative, the applicant could leave, but if the result was positive the applicant was

required to provide his or her real name and submit to another test to rule out a false positive. Additionally, the patient's identity number and other basic information, including home address, would be entered into CDC's national registry. Pan said that the Shanghai CDC followed up with patients who tested positive and provided free treatment and appointments. He added that this was not the case in other parts of China, but in Shanghai "treatment for HIV/AIDS is free from start to finish." He noted that "not all people with HIV/AIDS need immediate treatment," and that the treatment course was determined by sporadic appointments that checked for symptoms.

¶15. (SBU) Testing centers and hospitals did not require patients and blood donors in China to sign consent forms or privacy waivers for HIV/AIDS tests. Pan said that all blood donors in China were automatically screened for HIV/AIDS and other diseases, as were "suspicious" patients in hospitals - in particular, those receiving treatment for sexually transmitted diseases. He added that "some people know about the tests, but patients do not have to sign consent forms." Hospital patients or blood donors found to have HIV/AIDS were automatically entered into the CDC registry of HIV/AIDS patients.

¶16. (SBU) Health professionals and researchers voiced some concerns about CDC's handling of registry of HIV/AIDS patients. Zheng believed that the Shanghai CDC had good intentions to protect privacy but that, once a name was entered into a registry, all the CDCs across China had access to the information. He relayed a story from a male sex worker who tested positive for HIV/AIDS. The sex worker's hometown CDC visited his parents' home and told them "your son has a serious disease and is very sick." The sex worker fled to Guangzhou and was now receiving treatment by an undisclosed organization.

¶17. (SBU) Following this incident Mr. Zheng informed the

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Shanghai CDC that Le Yi male sex workers would not give their real names during HIV/AIDS tests. The Shanghai CDC advised him to have the workers provide their real names but not to put down their hometown or place of permanent residence. The Shanghai CDC explained that for the primary HIV/AIDS test, a fake name could be used, but for the second test, the CD4 confirmation test, the real name, but not place of residence, was required by law.

¶18. (SBU) Fudan University School of Public Health Associate Professor Gao Yanning pointed to another incident in which officials used the CDC registry to track down patients. In 2006, hemophiliacs who had contracted HIV/AIDS through blood-based injections from the Shanghai Biological Product Institute staged a protest in front of the Institute during which a policeman was stabbed with a dirty needle. Afterwards, the police used the CDC registry to locate the various hemophiliacs who had tested positive for HIV/AIDS and make arrests. Soon, the neighborhood committees easily figured out who in their community had HIV/AIDS. Professor Gao knew of some HIV positive patients who refused to take the free drugs because they worried that their privacy would not be protected and who instead chose to pay out-of-pocket. Professor Xia was also concerned about the lack of privacy and said that during the test, CDC staff called people by name to get their test results, so "what happens if a neighbor or co-worker is in the waiting room?"

¶19. (SBU) Shanghai CDC HIV/AIDS Deputy Director Pan Qiqiao told PolOff that protecting privacy was one of the most important and basic responsibilities of the CDC. He added that "there are few cases where someone's privacy was exposed, and those happened outside of Shanghai." He also pointed out that there were very few reports of cases of exposed privacy in the Shanghai media.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE SHANGHAI CDC

¶20. (SBU) The Shanghai CDC received mixed reviews from

healthcare workers and researchers. The Shanghai CDC is a government entity, although its employees are not civil servants. The sex workers approached by Le Yi Foundation faced many obstacles if they tested positive for HIV/AIDS. The free HIV/AIDS medication distributed by CDC in Shanghai was allotted according to a patient's residence permit. The majority of the male sex workers were migrants from Northeastern China and were living in Shanghai illegally. Furthermore, to qualify for free drugs patients needed to meet many other qualifications, such as proof of unemployment or low salary, which was impossible to provide working in an illegal, untaxed industry. Mr. Zheng was able to work out an agreement with the CDC to allow Le Yi sex workers to receive leftover drugs allotted to Shanghai, but they still had to provide their identity number, name and address.

121. (SBU) In Dr. Gao's opinion, the Shanghai CDC worked with the gay community on a very superficial level, mainly selecting activities with easily achievable goals that made them look good, rather than actually helping people. For example, he said they worked with "the community by taking two gay people off the streets and teaching them about condoms." He found their attitude to come across as very "scolding," such as when they ordered prostitutes to use condoms while trying to improve their image as friendly to socially-marginalized groups. Dr. Gao said only NGOs or the community themselves could make internal changes in behavior, not the CDC.

122. (SBU) Professor Xia hoped the CDC would issue "health intervention badges" to protect volunteers from arrest, which often happened when police raided gay venues. Unfortunately, the police did not distinguish between sex workers, customers and volunteers, informing the families and work units of all arrested. She also wanted the CDC to encourage and respect volunteers who worked within the gay community to prevent HIV/AIDS. She suggested that the CDC hold an annual award event

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for the volunteers which would be covered by the media. "Awards are very important," she said, adding that the United Nations AIDS program, UNAIDS, sent people to China to present awards and "if only the Chinese government could do even a little, it would go a long way."

123. (SBU) She also noted that the CDC appeared to be increasingly conservative in its dissemination of information about the rate of new HIV/AIDS cases in Shanghai. In December 2006, Xinmin Evening Newspaper published an article that contained the percentage increase of HIV/AIDS patients in Shanghai. According to Professor Xia, Shanghai government officials criticized the paper for making the figures public. Professor Xia typically sent a similar year-end report on HIV/AIDS in Shanghai to the Wenhui Newspaper, but last year they refused to carry her article based on the Xinmin Evening Newspaper's experience. She also commented that the Shanghai CDC was much more reluctant to release any sort of statistics to her, often saying, "release of such numbers needs the director's permission." Professor Xia asked, "Why can't they tell me such basic information?"

124. (SBU) Professor Xia added that the attitude of people working at the CDC not only impacted the level of transparency but also the local government's attitude towards HIV/AIDS. She cited the former head of the CDC who held meetings with researchers and academics and incorporated his findings into a report for the National People's Congress (NPC) in Beijing. According to Professor Xia, he was eventually demoted, and the position remained vacant, because the NPC did not like having a CDC working directly with the university community. She believed that the current CDC Director, Doctor Pan Qiqiao, wanted to keep HIV/AIDS statistics in the controlled channels of the CDC, believing it better to "be vague with the public so as not to alarm people." She pointed out that the national policy on HIV/AIDS was a good one, which "called for cooperation among many organizations and the full cooperation from the public."

125. (SBU) CDC Shanghai Deputy Director Pan was very open about

the numbers of HIV/AIDS patients during his conversation with Poloff and happily provided statistics on the number of HIV/AIDS patients in Shanghai, which are in para 2 of this report. He believed, however, that there was no need to provide gay people with a special legal status. He said China should not recognize a certain group by a special legal status "just because they are linked to a disease, such as elderly people and heart disease or gay people and HIV/AIDS." He added that the government should not give "too much political focus to a disease."

COMMENT

¶26. (SBU) The number of HIV/AIDS infected individuals in Shanghai may be significantly higher than the reported cases due to concerns about privacy at testing centers and the social stigma of living with HIV/AIDS. The gay community in Shanghai is at risk for increased infection rates due to the lack of understanding of the risks of sexual transmission and the low level of condom use. In most Western countries, NGOs play a major role in reaching out to the gay community and educating it about HIV/AIDs. However, NGOs are restricted in what they can do in China and governmental organizations such as Shanghai CDC have not been able to gain the trust of the community.
JARRETT